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For Kanak independence

The fight against French rule in New Caledonia

By Susanna Ounei

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Front cover photo: Eloi Machoro burns ballot box in Canala during November 18, 1984 boycott of Territorial Assembly elections

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Introduction

Since 1984, France's South Pacific colony of New Caledonia has been in the news headlines throughout the world. The Kanak people of New Caledonia are waging an inspiring struggle for their national liberation and an end to French rule. The purpose of this pamphlet is to help get out the truth about this struggle and its goals, and to seek support for the just demands of the Kanak people led by the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS).

New Caledonia became a French colony in 1853. In the decades that followed an apartheid system was introduced under which the Kanak people were dispossessed of their tribal lands and herded into small, infertile reservations. Tens of thousands died from starvation and disease. Thousands more were massacred following attempted rebellions against the French. Today, the Kanak population numbers a little over 60,000, while the number of European settlers (predominantly French) in New Caledonia is around 54,000. In addition there are around 30,000 other immigrants from the South Pacific, South East Asia and elsewhere, making the Kanaks a minority in their own country.

The first Kanak political party was formed in the early 1950s when the Kanaks won the right to vote. Called the Union Caledonienne (UC), it demanded political autonomy for New Caledonia. Demands for full independence began to be raised in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a militant Kanak youth movement developed. These young fighters began to assert pride in the culture and nationality of the Kanak people. Susanna Ounei, the author of this pamphlet, was one of these young leaders. Her speech, which is the main article in this pamphlet, details the history of the oppression of the Kanak peo ple and the rise of the Kanak independence movement.

The UC, which is the largest of the Kanak parties, also adopted independence as its goal in 1977, and in 1979, all the Kanak and pro-independence parties united together around a common platform in a coalition called the Independence Front (FI). In elections that year, the FI won 83 percent of the Kanak vote and 35 percent of the total, giving it 14 of the 36 seats in the Territorial Assembly — New Caledonia's colonial parliament. In June 1982, the FI became the governing party in the assembly following a split in the previous government coalition. It was able to use this position to deepen support for the independence struggle both at home and abroad.

A further boost for the Kanak struggle had come in 1980, when the neighbouring sister Melanesian nation of Vanuatu won its independence following a 10-year-long struggle against the joint colonial rule of Britain and France.

In 1981, elections in France were won by an electoral coalition of the French Socialist and Communist Parties, and the Mitterrand government came to office. Prior to the election, these parties had

pledged support for Kanak self-determination. In office, however, the Mitterrand government has firmly opposed Kanak demands for independence. This was confirmed in mid-1984 when the French parliament adopted a statute proposed by French Minister of Overseas Territories Georges Lemoine. The Lemoine statute signified a complete rejection of Kanak demands. It deferred any referendum on New Caledonia's future until at least 1989, and affirmed continued control over the colony by France.

In response to this decision the FI walked out of the Territorial Assembly and called a special conference of the Kanak independence movement, held in September 1984. This conference voted to dissolve the FI and to establish the FLNKS, uniting not only the pro-independence parties but also the Kanak and Exploited Workers Union (USTKE), the Kanak and Exploited Women's Group in Struggle (GFKEL), Kanak land rights committees, and other Kanak organisations. The charter adopted by this conference is published in English in this pamphlet for the first time.

The conference also voted to call a boycott of November 18, 1984 elections for the Territorial Assembly. Over 80 percent of Kanaks supported the FLNKS boycott, which was accompanied by mobilisations to occupy traditional lands and take control of Kanak towns. On December 1, 1984 the FLNKS established a provisional government of Kanaky (the new name for New Caledonia adopted by the Kanaks) with long-time independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou as its president.

The response of the French government was to send thousands of additional troops and para-military police to New Caledonia. Under the direction of Edgard Pisani, the French government's special envoy to New Caledonia, a wave of violence and repression has been unleashed against the Kanak people — not only by the military, but also by the right-wing French settler community which is itself highly armed. Since November 1984, over 20 Kanaks have been killed, scores have been tortured, and over 100 political prisoners are being held in jail. Among the dead is Eloi Machoro, a central leader of the FLNKS, who was assassinated in cold blood by French government forces. Published in this pamphlet is a tribute to Machoro by Susanna Ounei and an excerpt from one of his last interviews.

New Caledonia is a country rich in minerals and highly-productive farmland. For over a century this wealth has been plundered by imperialism, while the Kanak people have been kept in a state of abject poverty. Today the Kanak people are fighting to regain their homeland. Their struggle is a symbol of the new awakening of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific. The struggle of the Kanak people for independence and national liberation deserves the solidarity of all those who support social justice and the right to self-determination.

— May 1985

The Kanak people's struggle for independence in New Caledonia

The following article is based on a speech presented by Susanna Ounei in December 1984. It has been edited by Ounei for publication and first appeared in the February 1985 issue of Socialist Action Review. *Susanna Ounei is a founding leader of the Kanak and Exploited Women's Group in Struggle, one of the component organisations of the FLNKS. She is the official representative of the FLNKS in New Zealand, where she has been studying English since early 1984 under the sponsorship of Corso.*

The struggle in New Caledonia has not just begun now. The struggle began in 1853 when the French arrived and colonised our people. When they arrived they came with the bible. The bible was the beginning of our colonisation. In their bible it said, never steal and never kill because God will be unhappy. While we believed in God, they massacred our people and stole our land. Now we end up with nothing but the bible, and they have our land. That is the story of colonisation in our country.

While they were saying never kill and never steal because God will be unhappy, we were reduced from 200,000 to only 26,000 Kanak people by the massacres.

In 1878, a big chief called Atai, who did not want to follow what the French said, organised the people and we had the first insurrection in New Caledonia. For that, the people were again massacred. Our people were killed. Others were sent to Australia, some to Vanuatu, and we don't know where the rest went.

In 1917, when they fought the Germans in the first world war, the French wanted to bring our people to France to protect their land against the Germans. Our chief Noel said, "Why are we going to France to defend the land of the French against the Germans, when they are stealing our land and killing our people?" And so he organised the people to refuse to go to France.

And what happened to him? They cut his head off and sent it to the museum in Paris. To the present day, the head of our chief is in Paris. The head of our chief is kept by the same people who conquered us and who said at that time that *we* were the savages!

'Our people were humiliated'

After that, right up until 1953, our people — our grandfathers and our grandmothers — were too scared. The repression was really strong. Up until 1946, the Kanak people did not even have the right to go into the towns — they first had to get permission from the gen-

darmes [police]. If they went into the town after 9 o'clock in the evening, the white French had the right to kill our people.

Our people — our mothers, our parents, and our grandparents — were humiliated every day. Every day you would hear the whites calling us "dirty Kanaks" — and "Kanak", for them, was a really pejorative [insulting] word. Of course, when they were overseas at that time, they said we were "Melanesians", because they wanted to put on a good image overseas. But in New Caledonia they said "dirty Kanak" — that was for the men or for general use. For the women, they called us popinee or ponoche. This was the dirty word for us.

The Kanak dress [a frock introduced by the missionaries throughout the Pacific], for example, is a symbol of our colonisation. The Kanak dress was designed to distinguish the Kanak women from the white women. The Kanak women did not have the right to wear jeans or white women's clothes. They had to wear a Kanak dress, so that when the tourists came they could see these dresses and admire the beautiful folklore of our country.

We lived like that until 1953. Then our parents built the first political party, called the Union Caledonienne (UC). The UC at that time was simply for reforms; just to ameliorate our condition. But it was good, because it was built by our parents. At that time, our parents had to humiliate themselves every day in front of the boss. They had to clean up the gardens or the houses to earn enough to eat. We grew up seeing how our parents were humiliated.

In 1969 a Kanak chief called Nidoish Naisseline came back from France, where he had been studying. Nidoish Naisseline had been involved in the 1968 workers' and students' upsurge in France. When he arrived back in New Caledonia the word "Kanak" was really pejorative, but he fought to make it valuable again.

Then we created the Red Scarves. The Red Scarves was the beginning of our movement of today. At that time lots of Kanaks were arrested, including Naisseline. They sent Naisseline to France, but in 1972 we called him back again because the struggle began to get strong. He came, and we organised our struggle against colonisation around him.

We put the word "Kanak" in the forefront. It was our slogan: "Kanak". When the French saw we were really proud to say "Kanak", they began to call us "Melanesians". Before, it was "dirty Kanak"! In 1974 we began explaining to our people why we wanted to make the term "Kanak" valuable. And we talked about the land; the need to demand the return of our land without conditions.

When the French administration saw that, they set up an organisation called the Reforme Fonciere [Land Reform]. Under this they bought some land from the white colonisers to give to us. When we saw that we said that it was not just. Why should they buy the land from the whites? Before, they never bought the land from us — they just took it. Now, the white colonisers who stayed in our country can go back to France with seven, eight, nine or 10 million francs. Is that

justice? Yes, it is *French* justice today in New Caledonia.

In 1974 — at the same time that the Maoris here were protesting about the Treaty of Waitangi — we were also conscious that the 24th of September [the anniversary of the French colonisation] is our tangi — our funeral. We said that our people must stop celebrating the 24th of September. They must stop going to watch the army display and see how they celebrate our funeral. On September 24, 1974, while the army celebrated, we went into the middle of the road with our banners to protest. There were only about 30 of us. The army and the colonisers surrounded us and beat us in the street, and there was a lot of blood spilt.

They arrested two of us. That night we decided to meet again to protest against the arrest of our comrades. On the day after — September 25, 1974 — we went to the court where they were judging our comrades and asked for them to be freed. We said that if they didn't release our comrades, we would stay and occupy the court. They sentenced them to eight days' imprisonment, but we refused to accept this. We said they must be released immediately, not in eight days.

They called in the army and the police — they surrounded the court and beat us. Twelve of us were arrested, and we were sent to prison for six months. But now our people began wondering why we were in jail. They began to wake up. Many of our comrades now went out to the countryside to explain to the people the importance of Kanak independence and the return of all our lands without conditions.

And then our people collected money, and they brought two prominent lawyers out from France. One of these lawyers had been to Algeria before [during the 1954-61 independence struggle against France] to defend the Algerian people. When he came before the judge in New Caledonia, he said: "When I am here in front of you I feel young — 25 years younger — because 25 years ago I went to Algeria defending the same cause. The beginning of the revolution in Algeria was really similar to what the young people here are doing today."

'The struggle has no colour'

After this court fight, they gave us two months. At this time we began to talk about capitalism in the world; about imperialism. We talked about that because, when we were in jail, we were not only Kanaks. We were also with comrades who were not the same colour as us; some were white, and some were Chinese. And so we began to make an analysis that the struggle has no colour, although before — at the beginning of our struggle — we began with black and white. We began to talk about our strategy and our ideology — which way to take; which independence.

We went around our countryside to talk about independence, true independence. We don't want neo-colonialism or imperialism. We want true independence.

Then the right wing began to organise. They said that if New Cale-

donia became independent, we would not be able to get rice and sugar. (Our people love rice; we get it from Australia.) They said we would be like people in Africa, who die because they are hungry. And why are they hungry? they asked. Because they are independent! So we went around the countryside and explained to the people that our imports did not all come from France but from other countries, and we explained the importance of independence.

New Caledonia has a rich economy. We are the second-largest producers of nickel in the world. As well, we produce manganese, chrome, gold, iron, cobalt, zinc and coffee. And of course we have tourists; in Club Med. We said to our people that we must have our freedom, because the French use our land and say they are staying in New Caledonia to protect us and stop us from being hungry. Our reply was that as long as they stay in our country and we don't get our independence, we will always *be* hungry. So the French must give us back our country.

Kanaks murdered as protests grow

We have had a lot of problems with the French government since 1974, when we started to talk about the struggle. A lot of people have been to jail for erecting barricades or occupying land.

In 1975 they killed Kamouda [Richard Kamouda, a young Kanak, was beaten to death by police in New Caledonia's capital, Noumea]. When they killed him, we demonstrated and organised our people. We went to see the councillors who were in the Territorial Assembly [New Caledonia's colonial parliament] and we said, "The people put you here. They did not put you here just so that you could get a beautiful house or buy two or three cars." We said that they should fight with us. The police and army always beat *us*, but never the councillors. We asked, "Why?" And we organised a big demonstration against the killing of Kamouda.

In 1979 they killed Daye [Theodore Daye was shot by a racist French police inspector. The inspector was never tried, but was simply sent back to France]. We demonstrated again. Then they killed Kutu [Emile Kutu was shot when he and some friends visited an employer to pick up some wages that were owing. The employer refused to pay and instead opened fire. He was given only a light jail sentence and has since been freed] in 1980, and we demonstrated again.

In 1981 they killed Jean-Pierre Declercq, who was a white from France. He arrived from France in 1971, and became involved with us in our struggle. He was general secretary of the Union Caledonienne. When they killed Jean-Pierre Declercq, all the Kanak people in the countryside and in the Loyalty Islands protested at his murder. That was after [French President] Mitterrand had been elected to power.

Now I would like to talk about Mitterrand and his Socialist Party government. Before, when Giscard d'Estaing was in power, Mitterrand supported our struggle. He wrote articles and so on about New

Caledonia. He promised us that if he came to power he would give us independence. For that we organised our people to vote for Mitterrand. Not because we put our confidence in Mitterrand. No, we were not confident in him, because we knew the history of Algeria. When [former French President Charles] De Gaulle said, for example, to stop the torture in Algeria, Mitterrand at that time was *encouraging* torture in Algeria, and was against freedom for Algeria.

So when we went around the countryside and the Loyalty Islands to talk about why we should vote for Mitterrand, we said it was only to show our solidarity with the people in France — the French workers, who wanted some amelioration [improvement] in their conditions. They wanted to put Mitterrand in power so that they could then organise their struggle. We are not sure whether Mitterrand will come to power again.

In 1983 the people began to protest against the pollution of their waters by a French sawmill. The people from Koinde-Oui-Point asked the French government to stop the sawmill because the river was polluted and the fish were becoming contaminated. The people were getting sick. The owner, Barbou, came, and promised the tribe that he would stop his sawmill and give four million francs to compensate for the 10 years he had polluted the river. He said that he would give the four million in December. By December 27 he had not come, and the people began to organise themselves.

In January it was not Barbou who came, but the army — the helicopters, the tanks. They surrounded the small village, and from a distance of a few metres they threw molotov cocktails and began to shoot at the people. The people took guns and shot two of them — two army men were killed.

For that, they came back, put the people in the church and tortured them. The same church that they said we should respect when they first colonised us! At 2am it began to rain, and then they put the people outside. Then, after two hours, they brought them back into the jail and left them like that.

We demonstrated and protested. A group of five women chained ourselves to the outside of the French government's building to demand the release of our prisoners because, for us, it is not a crime to kill soldiers in self-defence. It is legitimate for us; we have to look after our own lives. They killed, and we had no arms. We chained ourselves there for 20 hours, and they sent in six trucks, six buses and seven jeeps of soldiers against us. For five women!

When we gave information about our protests to the television, they put across lies. They are all for the fascists, and never report what we say. So we organised and demanded the right to give our own information on the television.

Kanaks a minority

We continued to fight. [French Minister of Overseas Territories Georges] Lemoine came to New Caledonia and threatened the Kanak people. He said that he would ensure the security of New

The charter of the FLNKS

This Charter aims to spell out the objectives of the Kanak people, to explain why and how they are conducting a national liberation struggle so that their rights may triumph.

It has been reaffirmed throughout the continuity of resistance of the Kanak people for over 130 years, that there will be a defined period of national liberation struggle, a transitory period, in preparation for Kanak and socialist independence.

Why the national liberation struggle

1. Declaring:

(a) That the French government is a firm accomplice of the colonial situation, which it maintains;

(b) That Francois Mitterrand, who became president of the Republic by the mandate of May 10, 1981, has not kept to his commitments;

(c) That the declarations of Nainville-les-Roches on our innate and active right to independence have effectively not been put into practice;

(d) That the French government, rejecting all the measures proposed by the Independence Front to prepare the steps to Kanak and socialist independence,

- Is imposing on us the Lemoine statute with all its restrictions (election to the Territorial Assembly, State-Territory Committee, referendum in 1989, etc)
- Is directly threatening the Kanak people with the prospect of disappearing, by decisively making it a minority in its own land;

(e) That capitalist and imperialist exploitation by economic interests foreign to our country, is being continued to the profit of colonial France and to that of its allies;

(f) That the French government pursues an immigration policy which aims at,

- preventing control over the economy by the Kanak people
- forbidding this people the full exercise of its right to work
- striking at its integrity and at its social, cultural and political unity;

(g) That the French government is putting in place legal and military structures to repress the Kanak forces working for Kanak and socialist independence;

The Independence Front has judged that the Kanak people are entering a phase of struggle for Kanak independence: the liberation struggle.

Because of this, the Independence Front has decided to break off its dialogue with the French government, to dissolve itself, and to participate together with all the living forces of the independence movement in setting up a Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front.

2. We affirm the existence of the Kanak people, proudly attached to its cultural identity and to its own customary values.

3. We demand the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Kanak people, for since the 24th of September 1853 France has ignored this people's rights and has taken them away, unilaterally installing its colonial laws and system, a source of institutional violence in respect to the Kanaks.

4. The sacred and inalienable rights of the Kanak people, oppressed and injured by the colonial situation, are the following (see U.N. declarations 1514 and 2621):

(a) the right to be recognised as a single people;

(b) the right to dignity and freedom;

(c) the right to be considered as the only legitimate people in the Kanak land and to have there their own homeland;

(d) the right to practice self-determination;

(e) the right to obtain restoration of all the lands so as to set up the Kanak country as an integral whole;

(f) the right to the immediate exercise, without conditions or reservations, of their own sovereignty which will allow them to freely choose their political system: Kanak and socialist independence;

(g) the right to the necessary means to pursue their economic, social and cultural development in order to build socialism;

(h) the right to make welcome the non-Kanaks.

The Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front

1. Character. The Kanak people are alone responsible for their fight for national liberation. To best lead this struggle, they need an effective force: the FLNKS.

2. Composition. All the signatories to this Charter: Kanak independence fighters and anti-colonialist non-Kanaks, organisations, unions, movements, associations, churches . . . making up the FLNKS, are its active members.

3. Role. The national liberation struggle is universal: it goes on at every level at the same time. The FLNKS is therefore the union of the living forces which have as their goal the achievement of Kanak socialist independence. That is to say, a Liberation Front for freeing the Kanak land of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism, with the aim of setting up a socialism based on the local reality, but which will itself be defined in the course of the struggle by the fighters for liberty.

4. Organisation. Leading the FLNKS and co-ordination among its members is the job of the Political Bureau. This political nucleus will propose the line of conduct which will then be put to plenary meetings of the FLNKS.

5. Strategy. This will be worked out in the course of the struggle:

(a) It is a single and universal strategy;

(b) It is directed first and foremost against the colonial oppressor, the French colonial power;

(c) It denounces the false colonial "democracy", and will boycott every coming election held in this framework;

(d) It is equally directed against both capitalism and imperialism, and aims to install a more just and socialist society;

(e) It aims to step-by-step establish Kanak laws and principles, in this territory, by concrete operations which demonstrate its own rights as opposed to the colonial authority.

An appeal for a commitment

1. The FLNKS launches an appeal to the non-Kanaks. They must recognise the legitimacy of the Kanak people and support their national liberation struggle, so as to contribute to its success. Only such a commitment of solidarity in the liberation struggle will guarantee their future citizenship in the country of Kanak and socialist independence.

2. The FLNKS appeals to the brother countries of the Pacific and similarly to all those countries which have voted for declarations 1514 and 2621 of the United Nations, to lend their help and support to the struggle of the Kanak people.

3. It is urgent for Kanaks to get together and organise to win freedom. The first act of this commitment is for each to sign this Charter for the liberation struggle.

Caledonia, and that all the people in New Caledonia could participate in determining its future.

We disagreed with what he said because the total population of New Caledonia is 140,000. But the Kanak people are only 60,000 in their own country. The white French, who are descended from those who came in 1853, are 30,500. The other 49,500 are Chinese, Wallis Islanders, Tahitians, and other immigrants. [This figure also includes an estimated 20,000 French civil servants, army and police personnel, and their families, who are temporarily resident in New Caledonia.]

If we are a minority now, it is because the Mayor of Noumea, Roger Laroque, announced in 1972 that he wanted to "make New Caledonia white". This was after our freedom struggle had begun growing. Noumea is the capital, and a white town. Kanaks cannot live there because they have no work. Out of 60,000 Kanaks only 7000 work, so the Kanak people live in their tribes.

So they brought a lot of immigrants from overseas. The new immigrants (that is, since 1972) we got were all the traitors [that is, the supporters of French imperialism] from Algeria, all the traitors from Vanuatu, all the traitors from Vietnam. We get that sort of refugee! We haven't any refugees from oppression in South America or South Africa, for example — the true refugees. No, we get the traitors of the world — the rubbish of the world. They are all in our country!

Now the Mitterrand government has said that we will get independence through a referendum, and that all the people living in New Caledonia will be able to vote. We refused that. We said that only people who have one parent born in New Caledonia should be able to vote. This was our amendment, which they rejected in the French parliament in July 1984.

Now, about the elections [for the Territorial Assembly in New Caledonia in November 1984]. What happened in New Caledonia is not our fault, it is the fault of the French government. We told them that if they rejected our amendments we would boycott the elections. They said that if we boycotted they would send the army. We replied that the army has been here since 1853, and we are accustomed to seeing it and the violence it has brought.

So, before November 17, more and more troops were sent from France. Every day the planes were full of army personnel. More than 1500 arrived in our country. We've got the legionnaires too — the mercenaries.

On November 17 the people everywhere — in the bush, in the countryside — began organising barricades and occupied the land. All day on the 17th they fought, everywhere — east, west, north, south, and in the islands.

On the 18th there was a big fight. Lots of people were arrested, and one woman also lost her arm. The army threw a grenade and when she went to throw it back it blew up. She is still in hospital. People were beaten up by the army. It was violent, but the people continued

to fight.

After one Kanak was killed, a white *caldoche* was killed. The caldoches are the whites who were born in our country. (It is the name they like to call themselves, so we call them that.) One caldoche began by shooting the Kanak. Other Kanaks who were in the bush and saw what happened killed the caldoche. But it was not the Kanaks who began the shooting, it was the caldoche racist. Later, about nine Kanaks from Hienghene, on the East Coast, were killed. When they were killed the overseas newspapers reported only the French authorities' version of the events, not what the Kanaks had to say.

Massacre of FLNKS members

When a group of Kanak FLNKS supporters were returning from a meeting in December, a group of fascists stopped their car with barricades. They shot all the Kanaks, and then burnt the car. So it is not us, not the Kanaks, who start the shooting — they are shooting the Kanak people.

Now Edgard Pisani has been sent by Mitterrand to negotiate. He is seeking negotiations not just with the Kanak people, but with the right wing. He is trying to bring both sides together, but that is impossible. From 1853 until now we have been living with these racists; we cannot get together with them.

The French representative said he had come from France to meet all the communities. Communities? We said, "We are not a 'community', we are the true people from this land in the struggle." They can call other people ethnic communities because they are from overseas, but not us. We are not a community, we are the true people of the land.

Now this representative from France is putting out a questionnaire to the people asking how we see the future after independence. He tries to put both sides together, but it is impossible for us to get together with the people who kill us. We cannot continue like that.

I want to talk about the workers in New Caledonia. The majority of workers in New Caledonia are against our struggle because the French brought them there from their own countries and gave them good jobs. And when they have good jobs they forget where they come from and what has happened in our country. We have got Wallisians [from the Wallis Islands, a French colony west of Samoa], Tahitians, Vietnamese, Chinese, Javanese [Indonesians], and others. They all have good jobs while the Kanaks have nothing. We have no jobs.

The French used these people against the Kanaks until the 18th of November. Before then, these people voted for the organisations of the right. To help overcome this problem we created a Kanak trade union, the USTKE (Kanak and Exploited Workers Union) in 1981, because we felt that we must try and explain to these people that we are not racist. We see the problems of international imperialism and we must work together with them.

When we talked to the people, the mass media said that we were

communists, we were Marxists. The right went on a campaign against us in their newspapers, telling the people never to follow those who talked about independence because they were communists. They said that when we talked against capitalism, we were against God. And the people from Wallis are a strongly Christian people.

But on November 18, 1984, in the elections, the FLNKS in Thio were in control of this area. The majority of the people who work in Thio are Wallisians, Tahitians or whites. The FLNKS, led by Eloi Machoro, went to meet the Wallisians to tell them that they were not our enemies. We explained the problem of capitalism and colonialism to them — how it divides us in order to control our resources. We also explained this to the whites who have no resources, no riches, in New Caledonia and who work for a boss. We said to them that we are not racist, and we want to build up New Caledonia with them — with all the people who live in our country.

We Kanaks wanted the people of Wallis to understand our problems because, as we told them, if they have some resources in Wallis the French will probably bring the Kanaks to Wallis to take the jobs of the Wallisians. So we must work together and make the international links against capitalism, and build solidarity between the workers and those of us in the tribes who have no jobs.

The caldoches refused to follow us and the army came to Thio with their helicopters and took them away to Noumea. But the majority of the Wallisians, the same people who voted against our movement last year, came in to support our struggle. The came to help in the barricades. That was really encouraging for us.

Now I want to talk about the problem of women — how they consider our women in New Caledonia from the time of our grandmothers until now. The struggle of the Kanak women has also not just begun; it began in 1853 when the army came from France.

If we are 60,000 Kanak people today it is because our grandmothers had the great courage to hide our grandfathers and our parents. The colonisers treated the women like they would treat a dog. They used the women just to clean up after them. Sometimes they were raped by the army. That was the life of the Kanak women in New Caledonia.

Before the French arrived in our country we had our own customs and we had our dignity. And our customs are really different — we lived together in our tribe. For example, when a woman was going to marry a man in another tribe she would go with her land, and they would exchange gifts such as yams. When the woman arrived at her husband's family the land made a link between the two families. Nothing like that happens now, since religion arrived in our country.

Before colonisation a lot of respect existed between the men and the women. When religion arrived in our country it said that the women must stay at home and never go anywhere. They must just stay with their husband, and if they don't then the husband has the right to beat them. The colonisers said that if the women left their husbands, God would be unhappy. And so our grandmothers, our mothers,

stayed.

Lots of young Kanak women who were only 14 or 15 years' old got pregnant. The church said that we must not talk about contraception, because God would be unhappy. They said that it was a crime to talk about contraception. We created our own women's group against that, and we said, "Contraception is not a crime, but it *is* a crime for society to make a 14 or 15-year-old have a baby and care for it for the rest of her life." She has no job, and for us it is a crime to leave these women.

'The grassroots are the women'

We protested strongly because, before colonisation, our grandmothers *had* contraception — Kanak contraception. Since the arrival of colonisation and the bible, we have not had the right to use Kanak contraception, because it is a crime. So, when the 14 and 15-year-old Kanak women had their babies, they sometimes left them in the bush. We did not protest against the young women, but against society — the hypocritical society — because it left these young women to get pregnant by withholding contraception.

When we created our women's group we analysed the problem of colonialism and of our future. We told our people that they could not get true independence from capitalism or imperialism if they couldn't see the problem of the grassroots. And for us the grassroots are the women, because in New Caledonia the women do every job. They work as servants, and then they go home and do everything there as well.

So we talked with our people and explained that it was really dangerous if the men continued to oppress the women, because they could not talk about the true revolutionary movement for the future if they didn't see what was happening in their own house. And they must see the problem in their own house, and the situation of their exploited sisters, our Kanak sisters.

In our own women's group we felt that we must not only talk, but also move to help our brothers. We did not want to stay alone; we wanted to go together with them. And we think that we can change our Kanak brothers, because both Kanak women and men are exploited. So we must fight side by side with them; occupy the land together; fight on the barricades with them. Our group [the Kanak and Exploited Women's Group in Struggle] is represented in the FLNKS. But after each action, we pose before them the problem of the future and the problem of imperialism.

Now I want to talk about education in New Caledonia. From 1853, when the French colonised us, until now, you could count the number of Kanak people who got their degrees in France on your fingers. At school the whites said we were lazy and did not want to work. After primary school they would teach us how to look after a house — how to sew a dress or clean a house — but never how to continue to high school.

They also taught us in school that our ancestors were the Gauls.

Before France became France as we know it today, it was called Gaul. The people who lived in France at that time, before the Romans came, were called the Gauls. They tried to deny our colour — they said our ancestors were the Gauls, with blue eyes and brown hair. At school they never talk about *our* Kanak ancestors, but only about the history or geography of France.

Solidarity needed to break isolation

In 1979, when we began to resist what they taught us at school, they sent in the police. Every day the police and the army were sent to the high schools, and there were fights between the Kanak students and the army. They beat up young people of only 14 or 15 years. When the police catch young Kanaks in town they beat them and put them in jail and torture them. They terrorise the young people by saying that they can take them and simply kill them. They are really fascists and racists.

In the whole English-speaking world you will only find one Kanak, I think. When I came to New Zealand I thought I would find two or three other Kanaks, but I am the only one. In Australia, last month, there was only one Kanak who was there to seek support for our struggle. The ones overseas — about 100 of them — are all studying in France. If you never meet Kanaks it is not because we don't want to go to study or travel or to meet other people, but because we don't have the possibility of doing so.

So you can see that our struggle has not just begun, but has been going on since 1853. We need your support — international support — because geographically our country is small. It is only 450 kilometres long and 50 kilometres wide — that is the mainland. We also have three main islands to the east — the Loyalty Islands. In the south we also have the Isle of Pines and les iles Beleps [the Beleps Islands] in the north.

It is very small, and there are lots of army people there. Their boats are all around in the sea. They say this is to stop Russia or Cuba coming to help us. When they say they must protect us against Russia or against Cuba, we say that Cuba never colonised a country but we are colonised by France. And for that they call us racist!

Eloi Machoro — a martyr of the Kanak people

The assassination of Eloi Machoro — gunned down by the French occupation forces together with fellow FLNKS leader Marcel Nonaro on the night of January 11-12 — has robbed the Kanak independence struggle of one of its most outstanding mass leaders and organisers. Machoro, 38 at the time of his murder, had been elected general secretary of the Union Caledonienne, the largest organisation in the FLNKS, in 1981. He replaced the French-born Pierre Declercq, who was assassinated by white racists that year.

We publish below excerpts from a tribute to Machoro from Susanna Ounei. It first appeared in the February 1, 1985 Socialist Action.

I would like to pay my respects to the leaders who were killed, Machoro and Nonaro. They gave their lives for our people and our cause. It is an example for all leaders in New Caledonia.

Machoro didn't just consider he was a leader who gave orders for other people to carry out. He led by example. He was a person who was given responsibilities, and he shouldered these. He was always in the frontlines of the struggle. In that way he showed us what to do. For me he was a great leader and a good example for all leaders . . . .

By killing Machoro they thought that they could make the Kanak people afraid, and that we would give up the struggle. But today we can say that when they kill one Machoro there are 60,000 more Machoros arising in New Caledonia to fight the French army.

Eloi Machoro saw the struggle for Kanak independence as part of a Pacific-wide struggle by indigenous peoples against imperialist domination. He understood that this was not only a problem of nuclear powers like France and the United States, but that Australia and New Zealand play a pivotal role in maintaining this domination through organisations like the South Pacific Forum. This is made clear in the following excerpt from an interview with Eloi Machoro, first published in the December 14-20, 1984 issue of the Paris-based newspaper Rouge.

Australia, as well as New Zealand, are cornerstones of the Pacific Forum. They are also two satellites of the United States. There you have the problem of imperialism and control of the Pacific region. That is why over the years we have seen a shift in the position of Australia and other countries in the Pacific Forum. At the beginning, they were very favourable to independence because they had designs. They wanted, with the help of the Kanak people, to get France out of here and gain control of the Pacific.

However, as our demands became more well-defined, these countries became afraid of removing a power such as France from the Pacific. We think that it is because of this fear that today they are sup-

porting the policy of France.

Moreover, we are a native people, and so that [a victory for the Kanak people] would pose the threat of provoking reactions from their own native people. Thus, the last position taken by the Pacific Forum was to support the Lemoine statute that we have rejected.

We knocked for a long time on France's door asking for help in decolonising our country. The answer was a document [the Lemoine plan] designed for the destruction of the Kanak people. We asked the Pacific Forum to support our struggle. They supported the policy of the French government. So, we have been obliged to go looking for help elsewhere and we will seek it wherever it may be found.

Unions appeal for solidarity

By the same token, Machoro understood the importance of developing solidarity with the Kanak national liberation struggle from within Australia and New Zealand and the South Pacific nations, as well as inside France.

At the South Pacific Forum held in Tuvalu, August 1984, New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange and Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke took the lead in defeating Vanuatu Prime Minister Walter Lini's proposal that the Forum take the Kanak independence issue to the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation.

However, the Kanak struggle has won support from the Pacific Trade Union Forum, which incorporates the major trade union organisations in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific nations. Inside New Zealand, the Federation of Labour has issued a call for concrete solidarity, which is reprinted below. It organised a speaking tour in February 1985 with Claude Wema of the Kanak and Exploited Workers Union (USTKE), and it invited Susanna Ounei to address its 1985 National Conference.

The New Zealand Federation of Labour has a stated policy of solidarity and support for civil and trade union rights and freedoms among countries of the South Pacific.

Following a meeting of the Pacific Trade Union Forum in Vanuatu on 9 February, the following proposals were endorsed by the FOL National Executive:

1) Encourage and publicise a tourist boycott of Kanaky.
2) Encourage an economic boycott of Kanaky with a disruption of aircraft and shipping servicing Kanaky. (Endorsed in principle, to be implemented in consultation with the unions concerned).
3) Encourage and publicise a boycott of French products and services.
4) Distribute information in support of Kanak independence.
5) Urge Governments in the region and the South Pacific Forum to declare support for an independent Kanaky.

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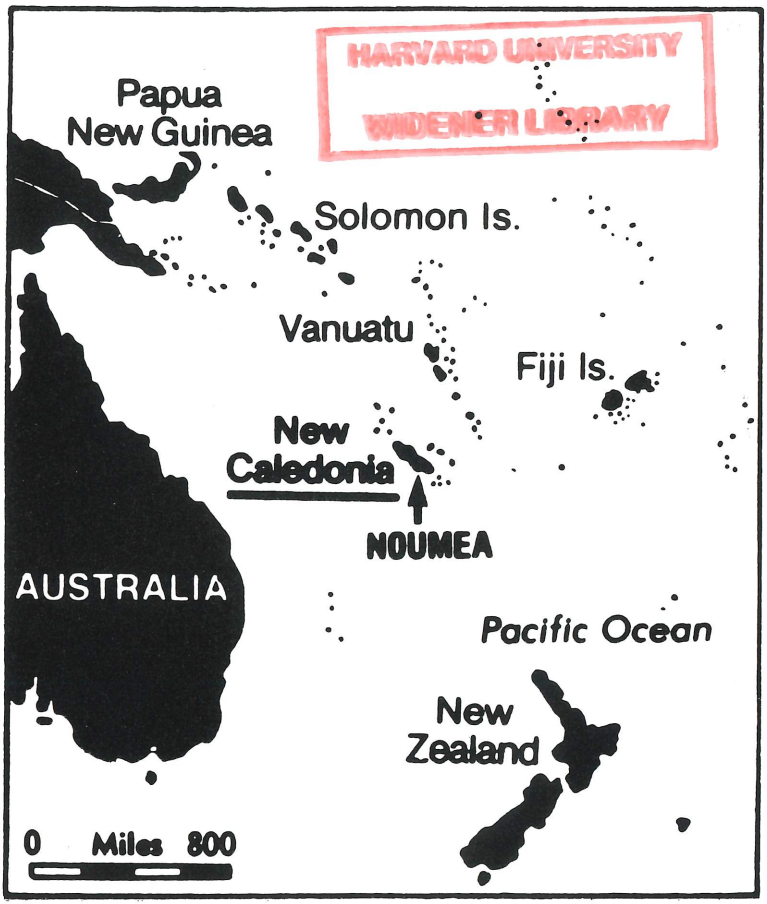
6) Sponsor, in conjunction with other organisations, solidarity tours by representatives of Kanak Trade Unions.
7) Provide financial and other support to Trade Unions in Kanaky.
8) Sponsor activities in each country for "Day of International Solidarity for Kanak people" on 20th April 1985.
9) Sponsor and fund the establishment of a Kanak Radio Station in Kanaky. Financial assistance for this project to be sought also from I.C.F.T.U. and French Trade Unions.
10) Sponsor, in conjunction with French Trade Union Centres, I.C.F.T.U., A.P.R.O. a major international conference in solidarity with Kanak people of Kanaky (New Caledonia), the conference to be held in Australia during June 1985.

National Council further endorsed this action and calls on affiliates and trades councils to support it, particularly the appeal for financial assistance.



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About this pamphlet

Since 1984, the struggle of the Kanak people against French colonial rule in New Caledonia has consistently attracted world headlines. It has become a symbol of the new awakening of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific against more than 100 years of imperialist domination.

In the English-speaking Pacific and beyond, however, very little is known of the history of the Kanak anti-colonial struggle or the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), which is leading the independence fight today.

In this pamphlet, Susanna Ounei, the official representative in New Zealand of the FLNKS who has been active in the national liberation struggle since 1969, backgrounds the situation in New Caledonia today and outlines the goals of the FLNKS. Also included is the founding charter of the FLNKS.

Support Corso's appeal for aid

Corso is appealing for funds for an urgent FLNKS project — the establishment of a radio station.

Currently all the public media in New Caledonia are controlled by right-wing pro-French interests. As the independence struggle has intensified it has become more and more important that the Kanaks develop their own independent means of communicating with their people and are not dependent on the biased French media for getting their views across.

Corso

Send whatever donation you can afford to: "Towards Kanaky Appeal", Corso, P.O. Box 9716, Wellington.